

A  
L E T T E R

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TO, A  
PRIEST of the ROMAN CHURCH:

Wherein the Grounds of their  
Pretended Infallibility  
Are Called for and Examined,  
IN SOME  
Q U E R I E S.

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L O N D O N,

Printed by *Andrew Clark*, for *Henry Brome* in *St. Paul's Church-yard*, near the *West end*, 1675.

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*A Letter to a Priest of the Roman Church, wherein the Grounds of their pretended Infallibilities are called for and examined, in some Queries.*

SIR,



Whatever our differences be in many points of Religion, we agree in this, *That it is the great concern of Mankind to examin well the grounds that lead him to his belief in matters of so high a nature.* You always tell me, *That out of the true Catholick Church there is no Salvation*; adding, *That this Catholick Church is the Roman*: though this seems to be a Bull as plainly as a general particular. Indeed so severe a Certificate makes me look to my self: I confess this method of dealing with me seems not so fair nor rational. For if any man study to draw me into a design, by telling me, *That as I must ingage in it all I am Master of*; so I must surrender up the conduct of it to others, of whose honesty, industry, and discretion I must not doubt; I presently apprehend a trappan, and you will not dispute it much that he deserves to be cosened, who suffers himself to be imposed upon so grossly. But certainly if my soul be more valuable than my estate, and if eternity be preferable to the vanishing shadows here below, then I have great reason to be strongly prejudiced against those, who would oblige me to hazard my soul in a tame and blind

## A Letter to a Priest

Subjection to the Dictates of any man, or Society of men; Reason being the only part of our Nature that was born to Liberty, and can defie all the severe rigours of Tyranny. You will easily believe I cannot be induced on slight grounds to forgo this dearest and most essential piece of my brother-right. And believe me it was enough that the Roman Church for a Succession of some Ages was Mistris of the Crowns and Empires of her Vassals, and had the dispose of the Lives and Goods of the better part of *Europe*. This was highly severe though Conscience had been left free. The Law makes my House my Sanctuary, but if I stir abroad I must be at my hazard: So whatever Power the Civil Magistrates, or the Guides of the Church may have over my Actions, or profession of my Faith, yet as long as it keeps within my head and breast, its natural dwelling place, it is a violation of the sacredness of that Sanctuary to invade it there, or make it prisoner. And when I further consider that Reason is nothing but a communication of Divine Light, to make me understand those Propositions, of which some hints were born with my Soul, and the rest are offered to me in Sacred Writings; if I throw off this, and betake my self to the Dictates of others, I exchange the Sun for the Moon, and the Day for the Twilight; and renounce the liberty of the servants of God for a bondage that excludes the freedom of a thought. And, at least, if I were to come under so heavy a yoke, I must before hand be well assured of the sacredness of the Masters of my Faith. No man can be wheedled to trust himself to any, of whose fidelity and good conduct he is not well assured; but he that commits himself to noted and known Impostors, is the object of all mens scorn. He must therefore have a  
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great opinion of his own Rhetorick; and of my easiness that attempts to perswade me to subject my belief to the Verdict of a Succession of men, who do not so much as pretend to high learning; much less to be eminent Saints; and in whom I can discern no great Characters, but of Temporal Authority, and high pretensions to an uncontroled Jurisdiction; and neither of these can with any reason determine my belief for one unerring Judge. But since I observe both from my own knowledg, and what I hear by others, that you of the Mission place your greatest strength in the Authority and Infallibility of your Church, and ply every body most with it, I have therefore considered this with all the application of mind I am Master of, as the fundamental Article of your belief. For if your Church be priviledged from error, all her Decrees must certainly pass for Oracles, and there is no disputing them: but if she be subject to error, she is the boldest Imposture that ever appeared in the World, who dares pretend to an unerring assistance in all her decisions, without good ground. Suffer me therefore to offer you a few Queries, of which when I am satisfyingly resolved, I will be brought so much nearer a belief, from which as long as these difficulties lie in my way, I must confess my self at a great distance.

1. And first let me ask you, *What necessity there is of an Infallible Judge, to whose Decrees all must yield absolute obedience?* If you convince me this is necessary, I shall without difficulty yield to you that there is such a Judiciary, since I am perswaded our blessed Saviour who loved his Church so dearly as to die for her, would certainly provide her with all that was necessary for her preservation. But here I know you triumph in the  
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supposed necessity of such a Judge, without whom there is no preserving either Truth or Peace : For if there be not a Court to whose Award all must stand, then every man is at liberty to believe as he will, and there is no end of errors : Which appears plainly in the Churches that have thrown off the *Roman* Authority, but are subdivided into many factions, which are the natural results of their opinions; for if every man must search the Scriptures, and believe what he thinks is the sense of them, then, according to the variety of mens complexions, educations, or inclinations, there shall be a numberless variety of opinions. And if none have authority over the persuasions of others, they cannot be blamed, much less condemned for their opinions. This seems such an inconvenience, that the Church must be in a very bad condition, if there be no remedy for it. This, Sir, I suppose is in short the strength of all you will alledge on this head : but all this does not prevail with me to acknowledge an *Infallible* *Judicatory* : for to live well is the chief end of Religion, and to think and believe aright is a necessary mean for that end : from which I infer, That if there be no necessity of an *Infallible Power* to make men live well, neither is there any for making us think aright ; and certainly vice and immorality is as opposite to the designs of the Gospel as error : now it is confessed there are no certain and infallible ways of restraining vice. And if it must needs be a defect in the Constitution of the Church, if there be no infallible means to restrain error, what must I conclude if there be no infallible restraint on vice ; but that the Church wants a main and necessary complement, without which she cannot be perfect, and well secured ; and you know St. Paul reckons

kons Heresies among the works of the Flesh. Now what reason is it, that of all the works of the flesh, provision should only be against Heresie? Therefore I freely acknowledge, that as God has left the Will at liberty, that so the glory of his Saints might be the greater, serving him not by constraint, but willingly; so he hath also left our Reasons free to judge of things proposed to us, whether they be true or false. Nor indeed can we believe but as our Reasons are convinced, for we cannot put a force on our perswasion. And since our Saviour told us it was impossible but that Offences must come, so I allow it impossible but that Errors should come for the greater trial of sound and true Believers. And I must add, that Religion consists in a few plain things, in which if a man bring along with him a sincere and pure mind, he is sure not to err mortally. He may be mistaken in some particular opinions, which though they pass for matters of Religion, yet are as extrinsick to it as the various Hypatheses in Philosophy are. I acknowledge every body ought to have that humble mistrust of themselves, and reverence to the Church wherein they were born, as not to be easily engaged in new opinions, and ought to be very well assured both of the truth and importance of any new Doctrine, before they receive it; and much more before they broach and vent it, to the disturbance of the peace of the Society they live in. And who so without a very clear assurance, after the diligent application of his thoughts, having purified his mind in the exercise of mortification and self denial, doth obtrude new Doctrines on the World is highly guilty in the sight of God; for renting the body, and breaking the unity of the Church: But if one after a severe inquiry, and  
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all due preparation be clearly convinced of any truth, how generally soever it be either unknown, or derived, he may, nay, cannot chuse but must believe it. But though this assurance may warrant his private departing from the received opinion, yet his assurance must be full; and his Call clear before he offer his opinion to others. But in that case I acknowledge the Guides of the Church may, and ought to consider such opinions, and pass a Censure on them according to the Scriptures; which (flowing from persons whose Character makes them both more particularly devoted to God, and more conversant in Sacred Writings; and, as it is to be supposed, are by the purity of their minds qualified for a higher sense of divine truth, and by their exemplary lives are possessed of the esteem of those over whom they are set) will undoubtedly have great influence on all serious and sober persons, yet such as are convinced that their decisions are contrary to the Scriptures must still believe God rather than man. But in that case the Magistrate may secure the peace of the Society, by obliging them either to rest quiet with their Opinions, or to go out of his Dominions. The Church may also by excommunicating them preserve others from being infected by their mispersuasions. And thus, except you give me better proof, I am not convinced there is a necessity of any *Infalible Judge* for deciding Controversies; and neither for the salvation of souls, nor for the peace of the Society of Christians. Not for the first, since no Proposition is clearer than this, That every Christian who studies to be well informed in divine matters, and sincerely follows his Conscience, shall certainly be saved. Nor is, this *Infalible Judge* necessary for the Society

Society since those who have the Legislative Power, whether Civil, or Ecclesiastick, may govern a Society well though they be not Infallible, so that the Church may have an Authority, though not infallible, and yet sufficient to secure her peace.

2. My second Question shall be, *whether there be really such an Infallible Judge on Earth?* For though this be not necessary, yet I shall not deny but our Saviour, according to that overflowing love he bears his Church, may have provided Her with this security against Error. But herein I must crave your pardon to tell you, I am very apt to think there is no such Court on Earth, for in all extraordinary things, to which our assent is craved, the means of conveying, or rather imposing, such belief (since no man of a strong mind will easily credit an extraordinary thing, especially that which subjects to it the very freedom of his thoughts) must have an Evidence and Authority proportioned to the Greatness and Importance of that they recommend to our Faith. And therefore when God sent *Moses* to deliver his People, and be their Guide, he gave him a power of working such mighty Works, which, being done in the sight of both *Egyptians* and *Israelites*, might convince both one and t'other that there was an extraordinary Authority communicated to him, he also told the *Israelites* to demand a Sign or Wonder from every pretender to Propheſie, or Divine Miſſion; And becauſe the power of evil Spirits is undoubtedly far beyond ours; ſo that many extraordinary things may be performed by Magick and evil Arts, therefore *Moses* (*Deut. xiii.*) allows even the People of *Israel* a previous judgment of the Doctrine of any Pretender to Propheſie, before they acknowledged his Authority,

or were wrought on by his Sign or Wonder. We find also the Prophets, either by Miracles or Predictions, proving their Divine Authority. And though the History of all the Prophets is not so full, as to give us an account of the Signs or Wonders of each of them, yet we have no reason to doubt but they did follow the Rule prescribed by *Moses*, which indeed natural Religion teacheth all men. Therefore when our Saviour appeared, as he proved himself the *Messias*, by the completion of the Prophecies in his Person, he made it also appear by the purity of his Doctrine, and the Authority of his Miracles, wrought in the sight of his Enemies as well as Followers. The same Method was observed by the Apostles, as appeared from their Acts and Epistles. And it is certain that as no man can be witness in his own cause, so no mans, or company of mens pretence to an infallible Jurisdiction, must engage me to believe it, otherwise there were no end of Impostors. Therefore I must conclude, That except you can shew me a Succession of men who, by some clear demonstrations of an unerring Spirit and divine Authority, prove themselves Infallibly directed, and uncontrollably assisted by God, I am not obliged to submit my self to any as such. Nor is it to any good purpose to say, That because there was a Succession of High Priests under *Moses* Law, who, by the Oracle in the Pectoral, did authoritatively decide all Controversies, therefore we may be well assured that under the clearer illumination of the Gospel, we are not left to the uncertainties of our own conjectures. But there must be a great High Priest of Christendom for judging all Controversies. But if this be well considered it will not advance your pretences a whit; for the Jews were  
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in all their Political Affairs, in their Commerce and Treaties with Foreiners, in their Government at home, and in the matters of Peace and War, to be determined by the Judiciary Laws *Moses* gave them; and as they enjoyed the Land of *Canaan* by that Law, which was then *Magna Charta*, so they were in all Civil matters to be judged by the Law of *Moses*. Now since no Law can give provisions for all emergents, there was a necessity of a constant Exposition of that Law in all dubious cases. And therefore God was pleased to continue this among them by the *Urim* and *Thummim*. Their Worship was also made up of a multitude of particular Rites, and many cases occurring in these of great intricacy, God continued that extraordinary Presence among them. But nothing of this was necessary under the Gospel, in which the policy of the several States is left to be determined according to the Laws of Nature, and the several Humors, Customs and Interests of Nations. Our Belief is also plain, and our Worship simple, so that none of these things remain that made an Infallible decision necessary under the Old Testament. And besides, the mysteriousness of the Communication, and the plain express words of the Institution, do shew the difference betwixt that, and any thing can be pretended to under this new and more perfect dispensation. *Moses* plainly told them what that series of men should be, and of whom descended; he also declared how they were to inquire Counsel from God, and how all must submit to their Sentence. Nbr was the High Priest by his Character vested with this Authority, but when he put on the Ephod, and went in before the cloud of glory, and brought back the sacred response. Now the exactness *Moses* observed in deli-

vering that seems convincing, that when God intended to bring any part of mankind under that subjection, he delivered his Commission to these so impowred, in so formal and solemn a manner, that it was not to be disputed but by one that rejected the Law of *Moses*. From which I presume I may infer, That if God had set up such Authority in the Christian Church, the Institution had been expresse, the persons clearly designed their Succession as plainly pointed out, to have put so great a matter beyond dispute. So that the manner of the divine emanations of unerring direction had been as clear as it was of old. Now since I meet nothing of this in the whole New Testament, I see no reason to make me believe it is as you pretend: For what you infer from our Saviours words to *St. Peter* from his saying, *Tell the Church*, and from his promises of the *Holy Ghost*, will never conclude that you pretend to: For before you can oblige me to believe any thing from these Premises, you must allow me to acknowledge the sacredness of the Books wherein these words are, so that my belief of the Scriptures shall not depend on the decision of the Church, but shall rather lead me to acknowledge its Authority. You must also allow me to believe these Scriptures are to be so expounded, before I own the Authority of the Church to be absolute, since from them you bind me to believe it. Therefore I must expound them so as may agree best both with the plain literal sense of the words, and the design on which they are set down, by all which you allow me the Exposition of Scripture. Now if I may expound it in some places, why not in all that is indispensably necessary to salvation? And your Churches claiming that Authority to her self must not oblige me



to believe it a whit the more, unless by some other cogent reasons I be bound to it: for none must be both Judge and Party, and no mans assertion must pass for proof in his own case; and yet the very places you alledg come far short of what seems requisite on such an occasion: for whatever may be said of *St. Peter*, which I shall not now inquire into, where have we any formal account who shall be his Successors, what shall be necessary to make any such, and by what means they shall come by these infallible directions. And indeed I can see no reason to think that had there been such an Institution in the Gospel, the same goodness which moved our blessed Saviour to provide so well for his Church, should not likewise have drawn from him such an explicit account of it in all circumstances, as was necessary for setting the thing beyond dispute, and securing any such Court in their Authority by an express constitution of it in its Members, and a Declaration of their power, such as *Moses* gave the People of Israel in the obedience due to the responses of *Urim* and *Thummim*.

3. My third Question shall be, supposing an Infallible Church, *How shall I be directed in my search for it, so as to find it out?* For the several Societies that name the name of Christ, being so broken off from one another, to which of all these must I address my self for a decision in all Articles of Faith? When I consider the beginnings of Christianity, that it first arose in *Jerusalem*, and did spread most in the East; when I also consider that the Eastern Churches had most Confessors and Martyrs in the Ages of persecution;  
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and had also the greatest interest in the four first and best General Councils, as appears from the Subscriptions, where the Western Bishops were scarce the twentieth part. When I add to this how undisputed their Succession is; and how long they have kept the profession of the Christian Faith, amidst all the severities and cruelties of the Saracens and Mahometans, under whose bondage they continue to this day, I am tempted to seek this Judge there: but when I see in what ignorance they live, and how the pressures they groan under, though they have not prevailed on them to renounce the name of Christ, yet have brought them to a degenerate means, which I love not to dwell on, nor aggravate, since the circumstances they are in plead pity rather than scorn or disdain; I am forced to turn away from them: but if I look Western, I see a Church triumphing indeed in outward splendor, their Worship is solemn and magnificent, their Priest in great esteem, and their High Priest culminates in Glory and Power; but after all this I cannot see what must oblige me to an implicit belief to every thing this Church imposes on me, since the Piety to which she pretends, is either immured in her Cloysters, or appears only in faces and outward postures of devotion: but after my most impartial inquiries, I can see no reason to esteem the Head of this Church a Saint, or such a Clerk, that I must adore his person, and submit to his Decrees. And if there be not some strange charm in his Chair, I cannot force on my self a belief of his being inspired. How then I must be directed to find this infallible Umpire of all differences? If you  
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send me to a Succession, you give me a hard task to labour in, and when I have found it, it is no more but what all must allow to be in the *Greek Church*. And I cannot see any thing in the Scriptures of the Bishops of *Rome*: so I am at a loss for want of some good directions and clear characters of this *Infallible Judge*.

4. My fourth question is, *In what person or persons of the Roman Church this Infallibility doth rest?* If you tell me in a Council, then I must ask you, Where this Council is to be found? for all your arguments perswade the necessity of a living speaking Judge; therefore I would gladly be satisfied in what City or corner of the World this Council sits; for if you send me to the Decrees of the Councils, this overthrows all your own grounds, from which you plead against the Authority of the Scriptures; and if I go to any Writings, why not to the Scriptures, rather than the Decrees of Councils: for every one that has compared them will find a plain simplicity in the one, and much of the subtlety of Metaphysicks, and the nicety of School terms in the other.

5. My fifth Question is, *what grounds there are for believing this supposed Infallibility; tied to the collective Body of the Church, and that it is not rather spread over the whole diffusive Body of the Christian world?* For if the Church be only infallible when gathered in a Council, then as there was no Infallibility in the Church for three Ages, so it was afterwards subject to the pleasure of the Emperors, who called Councils when they would, and is now wholly in the Popes hands: And as it was in the power of the Emperor, so it is

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## A Letter to a Priest

now in the Popes, to suppress this infallible Authority, which is thus subject to outward accidents; and must live or die at the pleasure of the Popes and Emperors. And indeed the Popes have taken up such jealousies of general Councils, that the World is not like to be troubled with more of them.

6. *If this Infallibility be spread among all Christians, I am not a whit nearer the resolution I desire; for when they differ in so many opinions, how shall I know which of them are in the right? must I travel all the Christian world over to examine of which side the greatest number is? This is our endless labour, therefore I must have a shorter way to work.*

7. *Who of all the Societies of Christians must have the interest to meet and give vote in a Council? must all the Laity be excluded, and only the Clergy be admitted? I must tell you I see no reason for throwing out the Laity. You know the Epistles wherein St. Paul gives the Rules for the Order and Government of the Churches, are directed to all the Saints and faithful in the Churches: by which it seems they were to have an interest in the Government, as well as their Pastors. We are sure among the Jews the Sanhedrim that judged in all things Civil and Ecclesiastical, was not only made up of Priests, and that the High-Priest himself was no Member of it by his Office, unless he were chosen to be of the number: nor can I find any thing in the New Testament, that excludes the Laity. On the contrary, the Promises of the Holy Ghost are made to all that believe without exception, and all Christians are called a Royal Priesthood: and in the first Council at *Jerusalem*, the Brethren concur'd in the*  
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Decision and Synodal Epistle, with the Apostles and Elders.

8. Supposing none but these in Orders be admitted to a General Council, then what interest must they have there, shall all be alike, or must the Bishops only have a Suffrage? You must give good authority for this before all must submit to it. It is not determined in Scriptures, in the Council of *Jerusalem* the Presbyters had a Suffrage; so it continued in the first Ages of the Church. We find the Presbyters subscribing in many Provincial and National Councils: Why must they be allowed there, and excluded in a General Council, it being only an Assembly of all National Councils? But if Bishops only must vote in Councils, by what warrant do Cardinals as such vote in your General Councils, since as Cardinals they are only the Presbyters and Deacons of *Rome*. Abbots also, though but Priests, get a Vote in the Western Councils: for as Abbots they cannot pretend to a Divine Character or institution, and if as Priests they vote in your Councils, why are not all Priests allowed the same privilege.

9. How shall I be assured a Council thus constituted is infallible, especially if I see or be told by the Historians of both sides, that all things are managed in this Council by factious Parties and intrigues? Each Party studying to wait opportunities when they may carry a Vote, and bringing all of their faction to the Council. This was plainly the case at *Trent*, as even *Pallavicini* represents it. And you will hardly prevail on any who has considered a little what the direction of the Holy Ghost is, to make him believe

that in a packt Meeting, where all is full of cunning and design, the Holy Ghost must be ever ready to direct them when they go to the Vote, and that this shall only be when the Bishops are in their Formalities at a Session, and not in a Congregation, which is the Council resolved in a Grand Committee. I know, Sir, our House of Commons understands this distinction; but what grounds have you to pretend to it, where all are acted by an infallible direction.

10. *Whether must the whole Council agree in a Decision, or the major part determine?* I know you choose the latter; but it is not easie to make any body hope that the greater part of any Assembly must be the better and wiser part, since we see it is most commonly otherwise. I know this must be the rule in a Court, that determines any thing by equal Suffrages; but if a Jury must all agree in the disposal of my life, it were but reason that all should also agree in the determining my faith, which upon the matter is the disposal of my soul. And I know no reason to believe the Holy Ghost will certainly assist the major part more than that he will assist every person that is allowed a Suffrage in the Council.

11. How shall I know what is a General Council, what not? for I find great numbers of Bishops have run together, and flatly contradicted one another. The *Nicene* Council decreed, the Son was of the same substance with the Father: this was rejected by many other Councils, some decreeing he was of a like substance with the Father, others that he was of a different substance from the Father; how shall I know.



know to which of these Decisions I must submit my self. The Histories give account of these Councils as called by the same Authority, for all were summoned by the Emperors Writ, all are represented to have been General Councils, and we are told of a greater appearance of Bishops in some of them than were at *Nice*: which of these must therefore determine my faith?

12. What reason have I to believe any Council is general, from which all the *Greek* and *Eastern* Bishops are excluded upon so slight a pretence, as that they believe the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father by the Son, and not from the Father and the Son, and that in their rooms then are substituted a great many mock Bishops, who are neither Canonically elected for these places, nor perform any part of the Pastoral charge in their pretended Diocesses, but are onely named by the Popes, and brought to Councils to make so many Votes?

13. Suppose the Pope give out a general summons for all Bishops, can this be more than a Meeting of all within his Patriarchate? for on what grounds can he pretend a right to summon his fellow Patriarchs, who by the Councils of *Nice*, *Constantinople*, and *Chalcedon* are declared equal to him: and therefore since the Emperors in the primitive times summoned their whole Empire to a General Council, they did it by their own Authority, as appears by all the Acts and Synodal Epistles of the first General Councils. What power then hath the Pope to call this great Meeting of the Church. And even these General Councils the Emperors called seem onely

to have been the Councils of the *Roman* Empire, called *Oecumeneal*, as the *Romans* called their Empire, *ὀικουμένη*. For the Christians of *India*, and the more remote parts of *Asia* were called to none of these Councils, nor could the Emperours Writ reach them.

14. Suppose the Popes Writ goes over all Christendom, must all the Bishops come to the Council or not? Or what number is necessary? If we examine the Subscriptions of the first Councils, what ever reverence we justly have for their decisions, we cannot call them *Oecumenical*, since there were so few Bishops from the Western Churches in them. Nor do I see a reason to convince me that a whole Province or Nation can depute a few to represent them, such Plenipotentiaries may do well in Political matters, but in a Judicatory that pretends to Infallibility, you must give me a good Warrant before I believe such a deputation can inspire one with more degrees of Infallibility. The Bishops of a *Province* can indeed send their decisions by any of their number, but this is not the method of Councils, where every Bishop hath but one suffrage, though but one from a Nation, though another Method was used at *Basil*. But in the case that a Prince is so dissatisfied with the Pope, that he will suffer none of his Bishops to appear at the Council, as it was in the Translation of the Council of *Trent* to *Bologna*, to which the Emperour would suffer none of his Bishops to go; and after that in the next Session at *Trent*, to which the French King would permit none of his Bishops to go; Whether can such a meeting be called a general Council, or

not?



not? No man can be obliged to that which is not in his power, and he cannot forfeit his right because of a force on his Person: Nor can it be a free Council to which all have not free access. Those also who live at a great distance from the place where the Council sits, and either through Infirmary, or Poverty, cannot perform the Journey, are in a hard case: For that which is morally impossible cannot be overcome. If then the meeting must be of all the Bishops, I do not see such a Constitution is practicable, or how all the Bishops can be brought together. And if the Infallibility be spread among all, no reason can persuade me that a packt Meeting can have the power of the whole because the Writ was general.

15. The Bishops in their decisions either go upon immediate Inspiration, or judge, as men, according to the Premises laid before them. I know you do not pretend to the former, but if you did, I would ask you what grounds there were to believe this? For if you gave any good ones I should submit to the suffrage of every single Bishop, since every person Inspired must be Master of my belief. And why should this Inspiration rest on some, and not on all, since all bear the same Character? But I insist no longer on this, because I know you reject it. If then they judge as rational men from the reasons that are laid before them, why may not other persons examine those Reasons as well as they? If an Inspired person speak to me in the name of God, I must submit to him; but if he speak not by Commandment, but by permission, then it is not the Lord, but  
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he that speaks: And though I owe great reverence to him, as to one that has obtained grace to be faithful, yet I may examine what he says in that stile. Therefore if they proceed according to the Rules of Discourse and Reason, I presume I may make bold to examine both the truth of the Premises, and the Conclusions they drew from them: Since as there can be no more strength in the Conclusion than was in the Premises, so the light of Nature and Reason directs me to know what is a well deduced Conclusion.

16. Whether can that be called a free Council where the Bishops have sworn obedience to the Bishops of *Rome*, contrary to their Liberties, and the Primitive practice? In which time all the Bishops pretended an equality in their Character, and called the Bishops of *Rome* their Colleagues, their Brethren, and fellow Bishops, and treated them as Equals in their freedom with them, as appears from the Instances of *Irenius*, *Cyprian*, and the Contest of the *African* Bishops concerning Appeals to the See of *Rome*. Nor did they yield him any other subjection but what practice had brought in by reason of the eminence of that City, which was then Mistress of the World; and because they also believed St. *Peter* and St. *Paul* had founded it with their Labours and Blood. But these Bishops who have so sordidly and meanly given up their rights to that high Pretender, and have sworn obedience to him, cannot be the proper Judges and Representatives of a Church, whose Liberties they have abandoned, I had almost said betrayed.

17. Whether must I believe the Decrees of a General Council before they are approved by the Pope, or not? If the Council be infallible in her Decrees, then I am bound to submit to them, for all the Popes rejecting them: But if the Council be fallible, then the Popes ratification cannot make the Decrees of the Council Infallible. For things cannot change their natures, and if the Vote of the Council was by an Infallible direction, then there is no absolute necessity of a ratification; and if it was fallible, the Authority of the Decree must be resolved simply into the Popes infallibility. For the ratification that is subsequent to the Councils Vote puts no more authority in the Council than it had when it passed the Vote. It is true in matters of Policy I know there be such Constitutions, which is the case of the Votes of our two Houses of Parliament, that have no force without the *Le Roy le veut*; but if the Council be infallibly directed, then it is not in the Popes power to reject their Decisions. And if the Council be fallible, then the Infallibility rests in the Pope alone, and who shall expect I can think the Council of *Constance* infallible in taking the Chalice from the Laity, and fallible in subjecting the Pope to the Council. Certainly, the Authority was the same in both, but because the Pope was a party in the one particular, he was sure not to ratifie it.

18. Who must be the Infallible Expounder of the Decrees of Councils? If you will leave this to every private person, then all these inconveniences will follow that you object against private persons expounding Scripture. For they may be drawn to several

ral meanings and opinions. And we know that at *Trent*, when the Divines differed in many Points of Religion, the great business was to find a temper, and to contrive the Decree in such general terms, as might displease neither Party. And thence it was that two of the Divines that were in the Council, and disputed in the Points defined, but differed in their Opinions, after the Council had passed the Decree, did publish Treatises for their Opinions, both of them pretending the Council decreed of his side: And though this was done before the dissolution of the Council, yet the Council took no notice of it. By which it seems they designed their Decrees should be Oracles, as well for their mysterious Ambiguity, as for their Authority. Where then shall we find a Judge of Controversies concerning the true meaning of the Decrees of Councils? If you put this in the Popes hands, you give all up to him, and so the Decrees of the Council shall signifie no more than he is pleased to allow them.

19. When new Controversies arise among Christians, to whom must they go for decision? Must they rest on the Popes definition? Then all the power is in his Person. Or must they stay for a decision from the Council? If this last be settled on, then I am afraid you Romanists are in as great a hazard as we are to have your Controversies endless. For ever since the Council of *Constance* the Popes have such mortal jealousies of Councils, that the World is not like to see more of them. We have seen none now above a hundred years, and the very thoughts of one are laid to sleep; and yet this is not for want of reason

son to call a Council: For there be great Controversies that do very much divide you, but in these you must not expect a decision. As whether the Infallibility rest in the diffusive Church, or in the Council, or in the Pope, which is a great thing to be resolved in, and hot Contests have been about it. It is also of great concern whether Grace be efficacious of it self, or only when the Will chuses to make good use of it; and about this there have been sharp disputes. Great complaints are also made by men of much learning and worth in your Church, against a corruption of Morals, and all Political Government, which approved Doctors and Casuists in your Church have publickly taught and printed, with licence: which deserves to be condemned by publick authority as well as confuted by private Doctors, and Censured by some Civil Judicatories. But for all these reasons we are not like to see another general Council in this Age. Suffer me therefore to ask you in this long interval of Councils, whether there be any Infallible Judge of Controversies, or not? If not, then all your high pretences vanish; if there be one, he can be no other than the Pope, and if you make the Popes Infallible in the interval of Councils, as there is no necessity of them, since we have already an Infallible Judge, so it were an inexcusable folly in the Popes to call a Council if the world acknowledge them Infallible.

20. I must ask one Question more about this general Council: you tell me, *None but Bishops have a decisive Vote in it*; How then shall I know when there is a general Council? For the Intention of the Priest

is by your Doctrines necessary to the Sacrament, how then shall I know if the pretended Bishops were baptized by one that intended to do it, or not? And how shall I know that they received Orders from one that gave them with a right Intention? And yet all this is necessary before I can acknowledge them Bishops: Nor must this be known only in this one Instance, though even that depending on the sacred thoughts of the Priest, which are known to God alone, is a thing wherein I can never hope to arrive at any certainty; but I must drive up the same question through the whole succession to the very days of the Apostles, for if one Link of the Chain fails, the whole falls asunder: Since any one that was either baptized, or had orders from any who did not intend it is neither a Christian, nor a Bishop, by your Doctrines. And all who are either baptized, or ordained, by one who is neither Christian, nor Bishop, are neither Christians nor Clergy men. Here is a difficulty in my way, that were all the other removed, I cannot see how it can possibly be cleared.

21. Having now tried your patience with some troublesome questions about your Church in general, I came to be satisfied in some particulars that stick with me concerning the Pope, to whom I see you must either yield an absolute Authority, or be without an Infallible Judge of Controversies. And let me first apply my last Question to the Pope, and ask how you know that all your Popes have been Christians, Priests, and Bishops? Since this depends on the Intention. So that for ought appears to me you may



may acknowledge for the head of your Church, one who is neither a Christian, nor in Orders. If then my Faith must be resolved into the Popes Authority I am sure it rests on a sandy foundation, since I cannot be assured he is truly Pope. And let me ask you, Do you think that with any colour of reason it can be doubted, that there was never an Atheistical Priest or Bishop in the Christian Church, whose Intention went not along with the Sacrament? I am told that in *Spain* many pretended Priests are discovered to be Jews; and sure these when they baptise will be far from joyning their Intention with that Sacrament. So here I stick in the first step, and must do so still except you can help me forward.

22. How shall I know who is Canonically Elected? The Canon Law declares all Symoniacal Ordinations to be null; and Pope *Julius* the Second, by a Bull *de symoniaca Papæ Electione*, declares him no Pope that is so elected. How then shall I know that in the Elections there was no Symony? For except I be sure there was none, I cannot be sure the Pope is Canonically elected. Now the secret transactions of the Conclave cannot be so clearly known as to free all people from scruples in this particular. On the contrary, we have the shrewdest grounds can be, for suspecting foul dealings in these Elections. Does not all the world know what interest the Factions of the two Crowns, of the Nephews, and the *Squadron Volante* have in the Election of the Popes? And all have seen the Intrigue of that Affair, so that the very pretence of any Infallibility after such an

Election is baffled out of the World. Shall any body that understands mankind imagine these Elections go upon any other grounds but Interest, Faction, Expectation, or some such base thing? And that after the Pope is thus chosen, to imagine the Holy Ghost is tied to all his Decrees, is such a monstrous piece of Impudence that I cannot have so little charity for you as to think any of you believe it.

23. How shall I know in the case of a Schism who is Canonically Elected? Many of those Schisms there have been, and all the Pretenders have put in a fair plea for themselves. How then shall I be satisfied to which of them I must offer up my obedience? And you know there are not three Ages past since for above forty years the Church of *Rome* was a Monster of two or three heads. The several States of *Europe* being as divided in their Obedience, as the Cardinals were in their Elections. And it is little to be doubted but in many other Counter Elections, had the Anti-Popes been as strongly supported as the Popes at *Avignon* were, they had been longer lived than they were. Let me also ask you, What right have the Cardinals to the Election of the Pope? Which by the Primitive Constitution should belong to the Presbiters of *Rome*, and the Bishops of the Province. But that Bishops of other Nations shall be made Titulars to the Churches of *Rome*, and so carry the Election, as it is a very recent Constitution, so can it pretend to no Divine Warrant. And if the Election belong to the Cardinals, you can give no reason why two thirds are necessary to make a Pope; for in such cases either the whole must



must agree, or the major Vote carry it; and if the last be true, then many a Pope is cast who is canonically elected, having the majority of the Votes for him. I confess in Political Constitutions men may mould matters as they will; but in Divine things, especially in choosing the Head of the Church and the Infallible Judg, I must expect a better warrant.

24. The Popes, if infallible, must either be such by immediate Inspiration, or by a direction of the Divine Grace, in considering what is proposed to them. To the former they do not pretend, nor do they wait for Enthusiasms, but proceed as other men upon all emergents. Now how can I be perswaded that a man who is wholly possess'd with affairs of State, who minds nothing more than intrigues, who has no education in any part of literature, but the Canon Law, can upon a slight hearing a Controversie, which puzzles the most refined speculative heads, judg exactly and truly, when I plainly see he does not understand the points in debate. And that this must be expected at *Rome*, I remit to all who know that Court: and it was truly the case of the Propositions of *Jansenius*, which *P. Innocent* condemned, though he confessed he understood not the matter, and never gave the *Jansenists* a hearing but once: nor can any body read the Bulls of the Popes, but he must see the grossest misapplications of Scripture, the falsest conclusions, and the weakest reasons imaginable. It were easie to instance this in a thousand particulars, which must needs occur to every one that reads them. Now a man may as soon believe  
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day is night, and night day, as think that man infallible in his Decisions, whom he finds plainly mistaken in many easie obvious things.

25. What reason have I to think he has the Holy Ghost certainly going along in all his Decrees, who seems plainly to have little or no sense of piety or vertue in all his actions and whole deportment. The Divine Spirit purifies as well as enlightens : it is true in immediate Inspirations this is not a constant Maxime ; but in one who expects the direction of the Holy Ghost by Prayers , Fastings, Applications of mind, and other such means, which is acknowledged to be the Popes case, he must have prepared his mind to a right sense of Divine things by the previous purifying his soul, otherwise a false Judgment is to be expected from a corrupt mind. And the Prayers of the wicked and their Fastings too are abomination to God. Now what men many of your Popes have been, I rather refer you to your own Historians than rake such a puddle : and since it is not to be disputed, but vices of all sorts have been eminently lodged in the persons of not a few Popes, who can force himself to think them a race of men that hold so near and close correspondence with Almighty God, as to have his Spirit alway at command, and yet have not by all that intimacy learned to escape the grosser and more common pollutions of the flesh. Though *St. Peter* tells us that is the way to become partakers of the Divine Nature.

26. How can I think the Popes infallible, when it is certain, if any thing in History be so, that  
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many of them have been guilty of opinions which General Councils have condemned and anathematized. The Stories of *Liberius* and *Honorius* are too well known to be much contested, the one having consented to semi-Arrianism against the *Nicene* Creed, the other being anathematized by a General Council (where another Popes Legats were consenting) for a Heretick. I suppose you are acquainted with the History, and therefore give but a hint of these passages, which are well known to learned men. I name not many other Popes whom Historians accuse of Heresie, but stand upon these two as more noted and signal: And if one Pope be a Heretick the whole *Infallibility* falls to the ground: and when I see Pope *Innocent* the First, and Pope *Innocent* the Tenth differing so widely in their Decrees, the one confirming St. *Austin's* Doctrin in the matter of grace, and the other condemning Propositions, which all who ever read St. *Austin*, and are ingenious, must see to be plainly consonant to his opinions; I cannot forbear thinking neither one nor the other infallible; for of two that contradict other, I am sure one is in the wrong, and if either of them be in the wrong, neither of them is infallible.

27. Is the Pope infallible in all he says, or onely when he gives out of his Chair his Decision of Controversies? I know you chioose the latter: but then let me ask you what is necessary to put him in his Chair, Must the Cardinals concur, then you share the *Infallibility* among them, without any colours either from Scripture or Antiquity: Nor do I believe your Popes will allow this in their Decisions, what  
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ever they may do in the Political Government of the Ecclesiastical State : By what means therefore shall I be assured the Pope speaks from his Chair, that so I may acknowledg him infallible : and if in any thing I must submit to his sentence, then most especially when he according to the Decree of a Council, takes care to publish a Bible, which must be by all Christians submitted to as the Rule of Faith, and set up as the Standard by which all other Translations, Copies, nay, and the Originals of the Hebrew and Greek are to be compared. This is a weighty and considerable business as any can be, and yet we have seen *Sixtus* the Fifth publish a Bible with all the assurances could be, that it was an authentic and true Edition, requiring all Christians to receive it as the Rule of their Faith; but upon this he dies, and his Successor *Clement* the Eighth gives the World another Edition of the Bible, and imposes it with the same Authority *Sixtus* did, and took all care to suppress the Copies of the former Edition, yet some escaped his industry. The difference of those two Editions is such, that the Catalogue of them makes up a Book; and any that has compared them will find that in many places the whole sense is varied in these Editions. This is as clear an evidence as may be, that the Chair cannot make them infallible, who do so flatly contradict one another, and that in a matter of so high and so general concern.

28. What reason have I to believe the Bishops of *Rome* infallible, or that they have an absolute Jurisdiction over Christendom, since I can find no traces of this in the beginning of Christianity, though  
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the defining it was then of great necessity? I find the Apostles all acting by an equal Commission, as indeed it must be where all were inspired with *infallible Illumination*: And why must I think that St. Peter left none of this *Infallibility* at *Antioch*, or *Alexandria*, but brought it all entire with him to *Rome*? And why was he so sullen as not to name his Successor, when our Saviour shewed him that he was to put off his Tabernacle shortly? Certainly it is hard to imagine that when he was writing his second Epistle as his last Will and Testament, that though he had concealed till then who must succeed him, he should not then have named him. I deny not but the Faith of the *Roman Church* was spoken of throughout the whole World, and that a Series of blessed and glorious Martyrs governed that See; yet even then, what ever reverence the eminence of the Imperial City, and their own more eminent qualities, procured them, the absolute submitting all things to their Decision, was not thought of. It is true the Fathers gloried much in the first Founders of that See, and in the worthy succession derived down from them, but thought of nothing less then subjecting Christendom to their Authority: Nor did the other Patriarchs pay any homage or subjection to them, but still pleaded an equality of Jurisdiction, yielding them nothing but a bare precedence. It is a thing I will not here attempt to shew by what steps that See did degenerate from its first purity; nor how it mounted to that height of Authority in which it glories at present: but any who is acquainted with the Histories and Writings of the first six

Ages, must needs confess that the Scene of the Church is quite altered from what it was then in this obedience which the World does now pay the Bishops of *Rome*.

29. What reverence can I pay a Succession of men who have plainly trampled on all Laws Divine and Humane? Who have pretended to an absolute Temporal Power, who have deposed as well as excommunicated Emperours, Kings, and other Princes, who have animated their Subjects to rebel against them, who have set on their neighbouring Princes to invade their Dominions, which they had rent by Civil Wars and Rebellions, and did for a Succession of many Ages fill Christendom with war, and cover it with blood? Nor are these excesses to be onely charged on some particular Popes as their personal faults, but they founding them on a pretence to an absolute Temporal Authority to which they laid claim, either they erred in that Decision, or not; if they erred, then they are not infallible; if they erred not, then though the Reformation has made them a little more cautious, yet still they are vested with the same power, and all these Decretals of Pope *Gregory* the Seventh are still in force, so that the Princes of Christendome are at the Popes mercy for their Crowns and Dominions, and are more obliged to the Reformation than they apprehend or acknowledge for the peaceable possession of their rights. But it is apparent the Popes still retain the same high thoughts, and onely wait an opportunity of executing them, as appear'd from the attempts of Pope *Paul* the Fifth on the State of *Venice*.



30. In the interval of the *Sede vacante*, who is Head of the Church? Is it a dead body without a head, or is it a Monster of many heads? Does the Authority lie divided among the Cardinals, or have they none at all? You know the Conclave have been sometimes very tedious in their Elections, the last continued divers months, and others have been shut up much longer; pray then satisfy me who has the Supreme Power of the Church all that while? If you vest the Cardinals with it, then you set up a Presbytery to govern the Church: For the Cardinals as such are the Presbyters of *Rome*: and thus before we are aware *Geneve* is translated to *Rome*, and the *Scottish* Presbytery culminates in the *Vatican*, and governs the whole World.

31. If after these difficulties about the Authority of Pope and Council, you tell me the Infallibility of the Church rests in the whole body, and is to be taken from the universally received Opinions, then what had become of me if I had lived when the whole World was become *Arrian*, and *Athanasius* alone withstood the stream? Certainly, I must have run with the Current, and may be should not have known what to have answered those who should have asked me, Where was your Faith before *Alexander* and *Athanasius*?

32. But upon the whole matter how shall I know what is either decreed by Councils, or Popes, or received by the body of Christians? It is not to be expected I can go over the World to examine the belief of all Christians: Nor can I examine all the Canons and Decrees of Councils, much less all the

Popes Decretals: Into what therefore must I resolve my Faith? You tell me, a living speaking Judge is necessary: but such a one is not to be had in every part of the World, therefore I must languish under great and constant uncertainties; otherwise I must resolve my faith into the Testimony of my Priest and Confessor. And thus all these pompous high sounding expressions of the *Infallible Catholick Church* do at length dwindle into this, that every one of your Communion must in all things believe what their Priest tells them, without inquiry. And in what a perplexity must they be when one Priest assures them one Opinion is the Doctrine of the Church, another tells them the plain contrary is the Doctrine of the Church. And this has fallen out in not a few cases betwixt the *Molinists* and *Jansenists*. So that upon the whole I cannot see how private persons can be satisfied what is the belief of the Church.

And now, Sir, after I have led you through a great many Thickets and Inclosures, I am afraid I leave you in a labyrinth, out of which I protest I cannot help you, but by advising you to break through or leap over these banks and hedges within which you have intangled your self. And therefore you must forgive me if I cannot follow you, unless I see you furnished with some thread to lead you out of that intricate Maze of difficulties, that must follow on your Opinions in these particulars. And I choose rather than engage in so dangerous a passage to take the sacred Writings which you and I both acknowledge to be divine, and peruse them with all serious care, hoping that God will so direct me,



me, that if I be not wanting to my self, I shall not err in any matter of salvation. You will find I have treated these Opinions I have considered with all possible fairness and modesty of Stile; and indeed, the sad prospect I have of Christendom, which is abused by such colours into so many and great mistakes, raises in me thoughts full of pity and commiseration, and not of insulting and scorn. If you send me any return to this, I shall expect the like fair dealing from you; and if you give me satisfying answers to these difficulties, you shall find that you deal with one over whom reason hath more Power, than either Education, Humour, or Interest. And so I bid you farewell.

FINIS.

Errata.

Page 1. line 3. read *Infallibility*. pag. 2. l. 6. *birth-right*. pag. 3. l. 9. for *one* r. *an*. pag. 6. l. 3. for *derided* r. *decried*. pag. 9. l. 6. for *then* r. *their*. pag. 12. l. 13. for *means* r. *meannefs*; l. 17. r. *Westward*. l. 19. r. *Priests*. p. 24. l. 8. for *sacred* r. *secret*. l. 25. r. *come*.